

Before I continue with the next journal entry I thought it might be helpful to the reader to explain a little bit about caving and about the atmosphere in the cave. As I re-read and think about my description of the cave I notice that much of the language I use in my caving journal, and the descriptions, or lack thereof, assume that the reader has a knowledge of caving and what it is like inside a cave. In other words, I write my journals for ME! I will take this time to give a more detailed description of the cave. I will tell about what it was like while we worked on the cave. And I will summarize our feelings up to this point.

The cave was "discovered" several decades ago when construction in the area unearthed its entrance. From that time to the present it has been visited by mostly locals in the area and avid cavers in the region. Beer cans can be found intermittently in the cave, mostly in the upper half. When the cave was first entered it was probably beautiful. Dust, graffiti, vandals, pigeons, and regular use have diminished its appeal. There are still places in the cave where small formations remain undisturbed, as a reminder of what the rest of the cave used to look like.

To enter the cave one must have a good length of rope, in order to rappel down into the rock. A nearby tree serves as a good anchor point. Once the rope is tied to the tree, about 20 feet away from a small cliff, it can be tossed over the edge of the cliff to a small ledge 15 feet below. Cavers can then descend the short distance to the entrance. Once inside the cave artificial light must be used. My light source of choice is a battery operated, helmet mounted light, known as a T.A.G. light. Safe caving calls for at least two sources of backup lighting. For my backup lighting I have a mini-mag light mounted to my helmet, and another helmet mounted light in my pack (which I always carry with me). I also have glow-sticks that I carry with me. These are not considered good sources of back-up light, by some, but they are good to use for taking lunch breaks. And they COULD be used to get out of a cave if the other sources fail.

After a short climb over large rocks the caver comes to a large pit. The same rope is used to reach the bottom of the pit. The drop is

only 50 feet or so, but it is not free-hanging. In other words you can't slide straight down the rope, which is preferable. You have to snake your way around sharp rocks as you descend. The ascent is made more difficult for the same reason. The pit varies in diameter from about 10 feet, to 3 or 4 in a few places. The walls are lined with a sharp, white rock called popcorn. Let me correct that: it used to be white, but is now covered with dust and dirt that was kicked down from above by years of caving. The popcorn makes it painful to brush against the side of the pit. My choice of clothing is Levi's, T-shirt, gloves and knee pads. I usually leave the cave with few scrapes but at least I am comfortable while I climb around inside. The temperature is stable year-round. It feels cool in the summer, and warm in the winter. We have gone in on freezing days, and 10 feet into the cave it is warm enough that coats are not needed. It is a good temperature to work in, as we learned.

For this size drop I usually use a "figure-8" descending device. For the climb up I attach myself to the rope using a Petzl ascender, but I climb up on my own without using the device. It is there merely as a safety attachment, in case I slip. Other cavers have their own methods of getting down and up. At the bottom of the drop the caver gets to do some crawling for awhile. There is a small room, about 6X6 feet, at the bottom that gives the caver a spot to leave his harness and descending/ascending gear. Since there is no more steep drops the harness is not needed and will only get in the way.

Once the caver gets down to the 6X6 room he can take a break under a ledge while the rest of the party comes down. Then he must drop to his knees to negotiate a 10-foot long passage that is only a few feet high. This is where the knee pads come in handy. The floor is covered with a soft dirt, intermingled with bits of broken rock from above. The thin layer of dirt does nothing to soften the blow to the hands and knees as the caver works down the crawl space. As a reward, at the end of the crawl, he gets to drop to his belly and scoot under a tight squeeze. Not "really" tight, just something low enough to make the caver scoot along in the dirt.

Once the caver gets on the other side of the squeeze there are a few feet of crawl space, then the cave opens up enough to stand. For most of the rest of the cave the caver can stand, or at least stoop. The cave splits off into several passages at this point. Two routes wind around rocks and crevasses and come to abrupt dead-ends. The other two lead to small pools of water. Each route is fun to explore. They all lead on for a hundred feet or so in a gradual downward slope. Most of the time the caver can walk upright in the passages. Other times he will have to climb over large boulders or occasionally crawl on hands and knees.

Water is a common occurrence in caves. I have been told that one of the local residents was one of the first people in the cave, and that his cousin dove into the pools using SCUBA gear. He said the cave continued down for a couple hundred feet underwater. What they were hoping for, and what happens frequently, is that the passage comes up somewhere else, with virgin cave passages to explore.

Unfortunately I don't possess the knowledge to give more detail about the types of rocks in the cave. When we were drilling we would have some parts that were easier to drill than others. And there were different colors in the rock (refer to the photo's taken in the cave). But that is the best I can do to describe the makeup of the cave.

At the point the cave splits into four routes, the two passages that dead-end are to the immediate left of the caver. Straight ahead and to the right are the passages that lead to pools of water. The entrance to the passage on the right is the largest of the four. The arched opening rises nearly 10 feet in the air, ending a mere foot below the cave ceiling. As the caver enters the passage the ceiling gradually lowers until it is about six feet high. It continues at this same height for the 40 feet that the passage travels in a continuous direction. This section of cave resembles a hard rock mine. Its arch nearly perfect and the floor flat and easy to walk on. Its easy to picture rusty mine cars on rail lines, and dust covered miners with blistered hands gripping dull picks. The

pseudo-mine comes to an end and the caver is once again forced to drop onto hands and knees and get reacquainted with the floor of the cave. This time the crawl lasts about 20 feet. The floor is sloping gently downward for the first half of the crawl. Then it gets fairly steep and slippery. Able bodied cavers can still climb carefully down the slippery slope. When I go with B I carry the end of the rope that we used to get down to this point. I usually need to tie another short length of rope to the first rope to make sure he can use it to reach the bottom. The crawl lasts a few feet beyond the bottom of the slide. Over the next 10-12 feet the caver slowly begins to regain the standing position.

After walking a few feet and climbing down a short drop-off the caver arrives at a small level area which has a passage leading down immediately to the left. The passage ends 75 feet later at one of the small bodies of water. To the right is a rock wall. Straight ahead is an indentation in the wall which goes back about 3 feet. On the wall at the rear of the indent is a small hole, about the size of a softball. To get near the hole the caver ducks under an overhang and kneels upon the rocks that rise above the floor by a few inches. By the time the caver reaches this point he is either warm or sweating and the first thing he notices is the cool breeze blowing out of the hole. It was my recognition of this hole as a potential doorway to unexplored portions of cave that ultimately led to this telling of my experience.

As has been my tradition for all the years I've been caving, the party reaches a point in the cave, usually at the deepest part of the cave, that all lights are extinguished. Complete blackness fills the eyes. For a moment the individual caver strains the eye muscles, focusing in and out with the expectation of catching a crumb of light somewhere in the false night. After several futile moments the caver turns his head at a sound- perhaps another caver- only to have the other senses return, and then heighten. The sounds, smells and feelings that have been overlooked to this point come racing to the caver in perfect detail. The pain of their own behind sitting on the cave floor. The smell of dust, sweat, guano. The sound of modern material shifting on age-old rock as cavers attempt to find comfort on this solid foundation. At the

back of every caver's mind at this time is "What if?". What if a person HAD to climb out of the cave with no light. Would he make it? Would he find all of the turns and bends which got him to this place? If not, would a rescue party find him in time?

The depth of darkness recognized at this time is something that is rarely experienced outside a cave. Many first time cavers erroneously declare that they have to hold their hand to within 2 or 3 inches of their face before they can see it. The truth is the human eye is incapable of seeing in an absence of light. If they did not hear something coming toward them, they would feel it before they saw it. COMPLETE and TOTAL dark! This exercise is a great way to remind people to take backup lighting.

As we proceeded to work in the cave we developed a system pretty early and little changed in succeeding trips. The first time in the cave B took first shift at chipping away at the opening. After about a half hour he needed a break so I took over. He told me what worked best and I continued doing the same. We would try new things from time to time, to use new muscles, but usually stuck to the same method. We would use the masonry bit and press on the drill as hard as we could and drill out a hole in the rock. Safety glasses and dust masks were worn while working. Then we would insert the bullpin and hammer it into the rock and break out small chunks of the cave. Then we would drill another hole and repeat the process. Occasionally the drill would hit a soft spot in the rock and that step would be shortened. We would work until we became too tired to continue, then B and I would trade.

While one of us was working the other would remain in the darkness and either eat or drink, or just lay down on the cave floor, padded by rope bags. After just a few rotations we were tired enough to catch a nap while taking our break. The only light we used was the helmet light on the head of the worker. Since it was pointing toward the hole, the resting person was left mostly in the dark. This was a welcome benefit, since the resting person was usually, well, resting. The rest break was also a chance to cool down a bit, which didn't take long in the cooler temperature of cave. Fortunately the temperature of the cave allowed us to

work pretty hard and not overheat much.

I remember that I frequently looked at the hole and thought, "Hey, it's big enough. I think I can squeeze through" only to be disappointed in my attempt. However, even after the first attempt and failure I knew that I would keep working on the hole until I got through. This despite the fact that I knew it would take many more hours of hard work. It actually became an obsession with me. I tried to get out to the cave and work as often as I could. I hoped that the passage led to a larger undiscovered cave that we would be the first ones to enter. I guess the explorer in me wanted to find a new frontier there in the cave. Since B is such an avid caver he was motivated by the same desire to find a new unexplored cave. What we did find was not at all what I expected...